New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

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"The House in Paris"

Play by E. Mawby Green and Edward Allen Feilbert, based on the novel by Elizabeth Bowen; directed by Clarence Derwent; settings by Stewart Chaney. Presented by H. Clay Blaney at the Fulton Theatre, March 20, 1944.

THE CAST

Naomi Fisher.....Cavada Humphrey
Henrietta .....Pauline Robinson
Leopold.....Alastair Boyd Kyle
Two American Girls...
...Marguerite Lewis, Penelope Sack
Madame Fisher.....Ludmilla Pitoeff
Max Ebhart.....Michael Ingram
Karen Michaelis.....Lorraine Clewes
Ray Forrestier.....Isham Constable

NEW YORK POST
March 21, 1944

'The House in Paris' a Musty Period Piece That's Sadly Dated

By WILELLA WALDORF

WHEN a Broadway opening is announced for "8:40 sharp" it usually means that the curtain will rise around 9 o'clock. Last night, however, "The House in Paris" started on time and since late comers were not seated during the prologue, several hundred first-nighters, including this reviewer, stood in the rear for twenty-five minutes watching a pantomime. The Fulton Theatre is equipped with attractive glass paneling which protects the seated audience from drafts and makes it impossible for a standing audience to hear what is going on.

The prologue occurred in Mme. Fisher's House in Paris in the year 1911. The play began in 1900 in the same place and by the time two acts had transpired and the third act was about to go back, or rather forward, to 1911 and continue the prologue, it was evident that we must have missed something important while standing back of that glass partition.

Suicide in Paris

Unfortunately, nobody seemed to be able to tell us what it was. Hardly anybody in our vicinity had heard the prologue. Those who had said it didn't explain a thing.

In 1900, Mme. Fisher was a genteel fiend who loved a young man named Max Ebhart so devotedly that she made a mere puppet of him, dangling him on a string. The poor weak fellow, after indulging in an affair with an English maiden engaged at the time to an upright British officer, committed suicide on Mme. Fisher's front stoop.

Eleven years later Mme. Fisher, older and apparently much changed, tottered from her sick bed long enough to give sage and inspiring advice to Leopold, the precocious son born of this unseemly union. What the little girl named Henrietta was doing around the house we never did find out but finally came to the conclusion that she was simply passing through in a kindly effort to help the authors with their exposition.

"The House in Paris" is the sort of play in which most of the characters go about telling other characters what they already know, for the benefit of the audience.

"Remember when we first met? . . . You were sitting at that window, painting. I said . . . and you said . . . and then I said . . ."

Mme. Pitoeff's Debut

The novel by Elizabeth Bowen upon which the play is based was possessed of some literary quality, we are assured by Sterling North On the stage at the Fulton it emerges as a clumsy, confused and dated theatrical exercise.

Mme. Ludmilla Pitoeff, who had a great name in Paris, is an appealing little figure whose English is understandable though hardly expert, and who has a persistent habit of inclining her head to one side like a bright-eyed, inquisitive bird. She has played many great roles abroad and one can imagine her giving skillful and intelligent interpretations in many a classic.

Of her supporting company, Cavada Humphrey managed to bring an authentic quality to the role of the long-suffering daughter, while Pauline Robinson, the little girl who played Henrietta, had a way with her even if we never could discover what she was doing there. Alastair Boyd Kyle as the precocious love-child was almost too bright to be borne. If Paris had had Quiz Kids in 1911, he would undoubtedly have been one of the ring-leaders.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 21, 1944

Unfurnished

By HOWARD BARNES

THE literary antecedents of "The House in Paris" are detectable. The new play at the Fulton has more talk per square foot of action than any so-called entertainment which has bobbed up recently. Since the conversation is so turgid that it even confuses the players, this dramatization of Elizabeth Bowen's novel is a dismal enterprise. It marks the Broadway debut of Ludmilla Pitoeff, who was quite a figure in the theater of pre-war Paris, and some elegant settings by Stewart Chaney, but neither the mannered acting of the star nor the Victorian decor saves the show from being a comparative dramatic debacle.

* * *

On the printed page "The House in Paris" may have been diverting, but it has resisted transmutation in no uncertain manner. In the E. Mawby Green-Edward Allen Feilbert script, it is a sprawling tale of unedifying love affairs in which a domineering French matron loses her lover to her daughter and the latter loses the lug to her best friend. A prologue and epilogue try to illuminate the problems of an illegitimate son, but with a minimum of wisdom and feeling. About the best scene in the offering is the off-stage suicide of the emotionally unstable Lothario.

* * *

The Russian-born star of the work has a tough row to hoe in this first New York assignment. Last evening she seemed to be enjoying the task. Perhaps she sensed hidden meanings in the play which were not always clear to an audience. With arched neck and deliberate accent, she prowled through the murky proceedings of the piece almost as though she were a strange literary character partially brought to life. After her triumphs in Paris, it is unfair to judge her acting on one play here, but her inaugural is far from auspicious.

* * *

The other players in "The House in Paris" are more credible, even though they may be more confused. Cavada Humphrey does what she can with the role of the old lady's daughter, while Lorraine Clewes is attractively in period as the lady who wins a fickle artist's affections and a son without a name. Michael Ingram is as morbidly intense as he is supposed to be as the artist and there is a clever bit of child acting by Alastair Boyd Kyle in the end pieces of the play as the bar sinister youngster. Perhaps a play might be fashioned out of the material which clutters up the Fulton stage, but that is something that still has to be demonstrated.

NEW YORK SUN
March 21, 1944

'The House in Paris,' Presented at the Fulton, Brooding and Lifeless Play

By WARD MOREHOUSE

A BROODING and dawdling play, awkwardly put together and one that brings forth some strangely uncontrolled performances—such is "The House in Paris," given its premiere performance last night at the Fulton. It introduces the Parisian star, Ludmilla Pitoeff, to the New York theater.

Mme. Pitoeff, an actress of experience and standing, occasionally suggests both Ouspenskaya and Nazimova, and there were moments during the evening when I found myself watching her fascinatedly. But she can do little with a play that is both lumpish and lifeless. Obviously, this new drama, based on the novel by Elizabeth Bowen, has been subjected to no end of revision. Numerous hands have apparently contributed to the writing and direction from time to time, but on the Fulton's playbill the authorship is shared by E. Mawby Green and Edward Allen Feilbert.

"The House in Paris," as done last evening in Forty-sixth street, is the study of the aging and dominating Madame Fisher, who in the year of 1900 is fanatically and possessively in love with a young painter—the only love of her life. To escape her tentacles he turns to suicide. In the third act, which is unresolved and which makes little sense, there is an effort to make the point that the young illegitimate son of the frustrated painter will escape the weaknesses that were his father's.

The entire action of the play takes place in the salon of Mme. Fisher's unhappy Parisian home, something of a haven for neurotics, and the setting is tastefully done by Stewart Chaney, who knows how to bring on the gloom when it is needed. The play begins in the year of 1911 and employs the flashback device to return to the beginning of the century. But back we come to 1911 for the second and third acts.

Most of the acting is hard to take, but I thought Cavada Humphrey and Lorraine Clewes, from out of the English theater, did well with two feebly written roles.

I wish Mme. Pitoeff better luck with her next English speaking venture. "The House in Paris" is dull and dreamy theater, endlessly talky and plodding for most of the way. Considered as a commercial Broadway project, I can see no hope for it.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 21, 1944

A Very Grim House in Paris

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THOUGH I haven't read the Elizabeth Bowen novel from which *The House in Paris* was adapted, I have read some of her other books which have very special and remarkable qualities. Above all, they have sensibility and wit; they are full of precise human insights, of subtle personal reactions. They work from inside and perhaps at one or two removes from reality. It has never seemed possible to me that her work could be successfully transposed for the stage.

The present play does nothing to prove one wrong. That it has little of Elizabeth Bowen

about it need not of course disqualify it. But it fails on its own terms; fails quite distressingly. And though I can't speak for this particular book, the play in general is just what Miss Bowen's work is not. It is shrill and theatrical. It has an old-fashioned and high-busted air; a cumbersome structure and very literary dialogue. Doubtless much of this was deliberate; for one thing, because *The House in Paris* is a period play; for another, because its characters are violent and strange, and naturalism would be inadequate to their emotions. But though one can understand the intentions one cannot approve of the effect. Far too much of *The House in Paris* is simply unreal; while some of it is decidedly high-falutin.

* * *

Even the story itself is not well worked out. It has a prologue and last act laid in 1911; the rest takes place 11 years before. The earlier tale is concerned with the unhappy relations between a young man and three women. One of these women has dominated young Max; he throws off her domination and becomes engaged to her daughter, whom he does not love. The English girl he does love, and who loves him, is engaged also; they have an affair; and when her family separates them, he commits suicide.

The prologue and last act center in the 16-year-old son of their unblessed union—a very precocious, very high-strung boy who has never seen his mother but who, at the end, is to go live with her and her very conventional husband.

* * *

As set down in the play, the earlier and later situations, though formally related, lack sufficient dramatic connection. But what is much worse, most of the characters bear little resemblance to human beings. Their passionate scenes smack of melodrama. Their speech reeks of book-writing. Their fatal and most un-Bowenish humorlessness makes everything disproportionate; for the play lacks that genuine intensity that can leave humor out.

The acting is mannered without having style. Ludmilla Pitoeff, who plays the older woman, had a distinguished career in France; she has interesting and effective moments, but her attempts to be feline and sinuous are too often overdone. As the precocious boy, Alastair Kyle is a correspondingly precocious child actor remarkable in certain ways, but with half grownup qualities that rather defeat themselves. The others performed pretty fancily, and pretty badly.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 21, 1944

House in Paris Weak; Mme. Pitoeff Great

By BURTON RASCOE

MME. Ludmilla Pitoeff is a very great actress (and I use the adjective "great" here with deliberation and emphasis), one of the finest artists I have ever seen perform. I should want no better evidence of her rare and precious art than her personal triumph last night in an otherwise dull, ill-written, old-fashioned melodrama entitled The House in Paris, at the Fulton. She took material which was downright shoddy and made something thrilling and memorable out of it, making you see and feel the motives and the emotions behind the mask of an evil and destructive woman.

Let those who cherish the novels and short stories of Elizabeth Bowen, particularly The House in Paris, not be misled by the fact that the play at the Fulton is "based upon" Miss Bowen's novel. The play and the novel are no more alike than a cabbage and an orchid. Such superficial resemblance in the way of plot that the play may bear to the novel only serves to make the contrast between the two the more appalling. . . . Even the rickety melodrama the Messrs. Green and Feilbert have made out of the "story" becomes absolutely absurd by the tacking on of a false and incredible "happy ending," whereby Mme. Pitoeff is supposed to change her character entirely, in the space of a few minutes and for no earthly reason, from that of a malign and resourceful succuba into the sort of wise, poised and sweet aristocratic old lady the movies have interminably made out of Mme. Ouspenskaya.

Not for Theater

That is, the lines the authors have given her would require Mme. Pitoeff to accomplish this quick white-washing of the leopard's spots, but Mme. Pitoeff is too subtle and intelligent an artist to let them make her utterly ridiculous. She says those "wash-up" lines quickly and keeps her characterization intact. Her final exit shows her not as a shriven and chastened woman triumphant in goodness but as an embittered and defeated one—which is certainly not in the script; it is all a matter of her expression and her bearing. Thus she lets the authors flounder in their own ineptitudes from there on until the final curtain.

In the novel Karen Michaelis, a wealthy girl engaged to a Briton of her own social station is infatuated by an eccentric artist who is also a professional philanderer and runs away with him to a shabby rendezvous in Boulogne, where she discovers he doesn't love her and is only in need of money. But meanwhile she has become pregnant. She determines to have the child but keep the matter a secret. She lets the child be brought up by a British family in Italy as their own and returns to England to marry. The boy is 10 when we first meet him, a "problem child" thrown together with a girl of 12 who is also a "problem child" in the house of a Madame Fisher in Paris, who has a clientele of "paying guests." Miss Bowen's story is the story of the children, with only a cut-back interlude, depicting the affair between Karen and Max Ebhart.

An Evil Woman

In the play the central character is Mrs. Fisher, who is depicted as something like the housekeeper in Rebecca, an evil and perverted woman, making zombies of everyone near her, including Max Ebhart, the weakling artist, whom she wants to mold into a financier for her own future security. Max has loved Karen years ago, when she first came to Paris, and she has loved him; but the two have been kept apart by Mrs. Fisher because, although Max is young enough to be her son, he is the only person Mrs. Fisher has ever loved. Max and Karen break away, temporarily, for a week in Boulogne, but Karen's parents won't let her marry Max or anybody except the British major they have selected. She has her child by Max and farms out the child. She returns to Paris 10 years later to recover him because the shadow of the child's existence has always been between her and her husband.

What you are asked to believe in the last 15 minutes of the play is that Madame Fisher, who has got her evil tentacles around the boy's heart, turns angelic all of a sudden and delivers the boy over to his mother, whom she hates.

The play is so creaky and old-fashioned that Mme. Pitoeff achieves a miracle in holding it together, I believed utterly in her. The others just seemed actors in a slow melodrama, although Alastair Boyd struggled valiantly with a difficult role as the boy. . . . But if you want to see acting of a very superior quality, go and keep your eyes on Mme. Pitoeff.

NEW YORK TIMES
March 21, 1944

Stark, Plus

By LEWIS NICHOLS

FROM Elizabeth Bowen's novel, "The House in Paris," E. Mawby Green and Edward Allen Feilbert have taken a play of the same name, which opened last evening at the Fulton but did not get anywhere in particular. The novel was one of mood; the play is one of words. It gropes around trying to tell its story in terms of the theatre, and succeeds mainly in giving the suggestion that this particular work may not be translatable. At least it is not in the current version, for "A House in Paris" has weird groupings of unreal language which inspired a fair quorum of the cast to go one better and give the worst that is in them.

The house of the story is run by Madame Fisher; English and American girls stay there while they study art and Paris in 1900. Madame Fisher is an octopus, to quote one of the characters, grasping everyone including Max Ebhart, who started out as an art student and then went into banking. Max got away from the lady for a brief time, though long enough to go off with one of the alumnae and render her into a maternal condition before killing himself with a penknife. Max, as they kept saying, tortured himself, perhaps unnecessarily. The product of the union later arrives at Madame Fisher's, to be given some advice by that lady. The action takes place in a couple of acts, a prologue and epilogue, and it is confused, to be mild about it.

Ludmilla Pitoeff is making her American debut in the role of Madame Fisher; she is a player with a good many gestures but she cannot be judged by a part in "The House in Paris." A youngster, Alastair Boyd Kyle, is as normal as anyone in the cast, playing the illegitimate son of the unhappy Max. A good deal of the acting is downright bad, as though the players, recognizing a lack of characterization, are desperately trying to provide the evening with something—and just make it worse. Stewart Chaney, who is designing most of the sets these days, has done this one of a 1900 living room.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 21, 1944

'The House in Paris' On the Fulton Stage

By ROBERT GARLAND

PLAY, players and playgoers didn't hit it off any too harmoniously last night at the Fulton.

The play was "The House in Paris," founded by E. Mawby Green and Edward Allen Feilbert on Elizabeth Bowen's novel of the same name.

The players were headed by Ludmilla Pitoeff, born in Russia, married in France, and, once upon a pre-Hitler time, a great lady of the Parisian stage.

The playgoers were patient.

Night in, night out, I'm consistently surprised at the well-mannered optimism of the average Manhattan first audience. It so obviously and so ardently wants both play and players to succeed. Last night's first audience was no exception. Men and women of good will, every one of them! Good will toward play and players, especially Mme. Pitoeff.

You could feel, you could even see, they were rooting for "The House in Paris" and the distinguished refugee who, somewhat shakily, was making her New York debut therein. Playgoers were meeting play and players at least half way. My regret is that nothing of great—or small—importance came out of their good wishes. Like the clock up on the Fulton's stage, the action of the piece failed to get a move on in 11 endless years.

Pair of Prologues

Curious as it may seem, "The House in Paris" is the possessor of a prologue at each end. As is customary, the prologue opens the play. As is not customary, the prologue also closes it. Laid in the year 1911, this prologue stands aside to permit such action as there is to flash back to the April, May, June and July of 1900. These dead, but not departed, months out of the way, the prologue is resumed.

As if this decade-jumping were not suf-

ficiently confusing, the story "The House in Paris" sets out to tell is even more so. Listening last night with open-eyed attention, I had no really clear idea as to what was going on in the atmospheric Stewart Chaney salon of Mme. Fisher's home in Paris. Neither had most of my fellow professional first-nighters.

So all I can tell you is that there's an avaricious old lady—the Mme. Fisher who owns the atmospheric Stewart Chaney salon—who dominates all the other people in the play. A materialistic matriarch, if there ever was one, she's a tough old bird whose tough old influence reaches to the second and third generation of those who, by hook or crook, belong to her. Kiddies cower when she addresses them.

Nervous, Maybe

All but the kiddie known as Leopold who, in the astonishingly competent hands of young Alastair Boyd Kyle, gives the top performance in a not-too-well-acted play. If you hurried and got there before it closed, you would have seen him a season or so ago in Eddie Dowling's ill-fated "The Rock." Or you may have heard him on the radio, in "Portia Faces Life," "True Story" or "We, the People"—whatever they are!

Cavada Humphrey repeats the costumey—if I know what I mean—performance she gave a while back in "Ladies in Retirement." The others come and go. As they do so, they strengthen my impression that they're none too sure of their whys and wherefores. The wobbly direction of Clarence Derwent does little to assure them.

All of which brings me to Ludmilla Pitoeff, the somewhat stagnant star of last night's occasion. I'm told that, until the Nazi invasion of Paris, Mme. Pitoeff was hailed as "the first actress of France." And, at London's Globe Theatre, Bernard Shaw called her St. Joan the greatest his wise old eyes had seen . . . Well, as my mother used to say, try everything twice; you may be nervous the first time! Last night, Mme. Pitoeff may have been nervous.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 21, 1944

Mme. Pitoeff Makes Her Debut in Slow-Going 'House in Paris'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

INTEREST in "The House in Paris" must, I am afraid, be centered upon the performances of its star, Ludmilla Pitoeff, and a boy, Alastair Boyd Kyle; for the play is slow and bookish and only too rarely does it reach out and seize the listener and move him along a jog or two.

In the new drama at the Fulton Theatre Mme. Pitoeff is making her New York debut. Russian-born and French-trained, she was in Paris one of "the Pitoeffs," an illustrious husband-and-wife team who staged and acted some of the best things in the modern theatre. She is an actress. The handicap of not knowing our tongue too well—which makes her extraordinarily careful of what she says—is not serious enough to hide an interesting personality and an admirable acquaintance with stagecraft.

Mme. Pitoeff is not an actressy actress; she climbs no trees, bites no scenery, but rather works with economy and certainty. She has a mobile face, a flexible voice, an ability to make small, quick gestures more important than heroic ones. But completely to enliven "The House in Paris" is too much even for her.

Made From a Novel

I've said the play is bookish. It is adapted from a popular novel by Elizabeth Bowen, which I haven't read, so I can't tell whether the printed-page effect of many of its passages comes from Miss Bowen's work or is something that was unfortunately conceived by its adapters, E. Mawby Green and Edward Allen Feilbert. But the correctness, the small preciseness, of everybody's talk becomes wearing, and Director Clarence Derwent failed to build fires under people to make them get going.

The house in Paris is Mme. Fisher's pension and the time is partly 1900, partly 1911. Here come various American and English girls for a year of Parisian "culture" under the keen eye, sharp mind and stern will of the proprietress. To most it is just a not too pleasant year, for they are transients; but to one young man and a young woman it is a zombie existence, for they are dominated by Mme. Fisher.

The lady is insatiably ambitious, a schemer, a female general. She makes the young man, who wanted to be an artist, go into a bank; she makes the young woman, her daughter, a pallid and yearning spinster. The would-be artist tries to rebel, but the only way he finally manages to free himself of Mme. Fisher and go on his own is to kill himself.

His Mother's Son

The suicide has left something of himself behind—a son born after his death to one of Mme. Fisher's English pensionnaires, and the son turns up at the house eleven years later. The lad is precocious, eerie, given to quick rages—the embodiment of all that was distraught in his father. Once again Mme. Fisher, now old and dying, has something to manage—but this time she manages better. The lad catches the drive of this quiet, fierce old lady, which his beaten father never could do.

Young Kyle, as the boy, is admirable and remarkable. He can take any situation on the stage and make it his own, and his assurance and crispness are electric. Michael Ingram, as the chap who cuts himself loose with a knife, has a rather trying time losing his mind, and Cavada Humphrey is a proper gentle spinster. Lorraine Clewes, as the lass who has the baby, is very decorative in early 20th Century costumes. The French drawing-room set by Stewart Chaney is handsome and intelligently designed for the mood of the play.

"Jacobowsky and the Colonel"

Play by S. N. Behrman based on an original by Franz Werfel; directed by Elia Kazan; settings by Stewart Chaney. Presented by the Theatre Guild in association with Jack H. Skirball at the Martin Beck Theatre, March 14, 1944.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 15, 1944

Sense, Wit and Poetry

By HOWARD BARNES

A PLAY of stature and consequence has finally come to town. "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" mixes sense, wit and poetry in a memorable theatrical reflection of the war. On the surface this S. N. Behrman adaptation of an original Franz Werfel script is little more than an eloquent satire on the fall of France. It clothes a desperate chapter in the affairs of man in humor and more or less trivial personal incident. Behind the gayety is a profound and searching statement of human values and experience which floods the stage of the Martin Beck with beauty and emotional power. What might have been either a parody or a parable emerges as an absorbing and singularly satisfying drama.

* * *

The stuff of a fine play must have been inherent in the project from the start. Clifford Odets had a hand in reshaping the Werfel work. Behrman has obviously contributed the imagination and the sure craftsmanship which keeps the piece unfaltering through six splendid scenes. Although it veers from ridiculous nonsense to melodrama, the production never steps out of bounds. It is full of laughter, as a stuffy aristocratic Polish officer, his mistress and a "fluctuating" Jewish refugee flee from Paris on the eve of Nazi occupation. There are few moments of comedy which are not freighted with the terrible and imponderable implications of the present conflict.

* * *

It takes tall writing to work this trick behind footlights. Behrman has never failed to make his adaptation felicitous and honest. The characters are brilliantly illuminated by deft dialogue. The action is confined to a simple, explicit pattern which has no truck with expedient horror or violence. All that "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" pretends to do is to present several uprooted people in the cataclysm of war and discover some key to the inner impulses which govern them. It does this magnificently. Whether the Colonel and the Jewish refugee are trying to bridge centuries of different conditioning, or a French girl is giving up her chance for safety to stay among her conquered people, the play rings as clear as a bell.

* * *

The players in this Theater Guild production are to be congratulated for having been given sound and recognizable parts. The show is fortunate in having an excellent company. Oscar Karlweis, who plays the wandering Jew of the tale, brings tremendous tension and tenderness to his portrayal, without ever laboring the racial issue, which is inevitable in the role. Louis Calhern, after a bad start last evening, rose to the full demands of the Polish colonel, who found it painful to think, until he thought through to some eternal verities.

THE CAST

A Young Girl	Louise Dowdney
Sleeping Shopkeeper	Harrison Winter
The Tragic Gentleman	Herbert Yost
Old Lady from Arras	Jane Marbury
Madame Bouffier	Hilda Vaughn
Salomon	Harry Davis
Szycke	Peter Kass
Szabuniewicz	J. Edward Bromberg
S. L. Jacobowsky	Oscar Karlweis
Air Raid Warden	Philip Collier
Colonel Tadeusz Boleslav Stjerbinsky	Louis Calhern
Cosette	Kitty Mattern
A Chauffeur	Coby Ruskin
Monsieur Serouille	Donald Cameron
Marianne	Annabella
Brigadier	E. G. Marshall
Street Singer	Joseph Kallini
Child	Jules Leni
First Lieutenant	Frank Overton
Gestapo Official	Harold Vermilyea
Wilhelm	Donald Lee
Max	Bob Merritt
Papa Clairon	Harry Davis
The Dice Player	Philip Coolidge
Senator Brisson	Donald Cameron
The Commissaire	William Sanders
Gendarme	Burton Tripp
Sergeant De Ville	Edward Kreisler

Annabella is excellent as the French girl and J. Edward Bromberg is a bulwark in the supporting cast. Meanwhile Elia Kazan, who is rapidly becoming a great director, has staged the work with craft and feeling. "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" finds the stage at the top of its form.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 15, 1944

'Jacobowsky and the Colonel' Better Performed Than Written

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THERE are many highly amusing scenes in the Theatre Guild's "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" and the title roles are enchantingly played by Oscar Karlweis and Louis Calhern, but the whole play is a disappointment because of an irritating mixture of artificiality and genuineness.

It is genuine when Jacobowsky, a little wandering Jew, and the Colonel, a high-nosed Polish cavalry officer, try to reconcile their viewpoints—which are as far apart as two Poles'—and escape together from the Nazis who have invaded France. It is funny when little Jacobowsky's resilient, sparrow-like mind thinks them out of jams, or when the two are exhibiting their varied devotion to the same girl.

But, often, it is neither funny nor dramatic, but just plain theatrical unreality. At these times the dialogue is stilted and is spoken woodenly. Whenever somebody has a speech —and there are several—or a message about the war and the little Jacobowskys all over the world, the writing becomes self-conscious, stiff and, I hope, almost embarrassed.

An Unreal Finale

The final unbelievable artifice is the last moment of the play. Jacobowsky, the Colonel, the Colonel's girl, the Colonel's sergeant and a little French waif they've picked up are on a mole at Hendaye, waiting for a British motorboat to take the Colonel and some priceless Polish documents to England. There is room in the boat for two, and the Colonel finally picks Jacobowsky because he is sure now the little man can fight well for Poland —with his head.

The girl says farewell, and says she'll be waiting—and the sergeant sits down on the pier, gets out a harmonica and plays "La Marseillaise" as a Nazi patrol approaches. It's a phony ending and is neither convincing nor moving. The movies have done it better—much better; as, for instance in the not dissimilar parting of Michele Morgan and Paul Henreid in "Joan of Paris."

A Long Time Fixing

"Jacobowsky" has had quite a career and maybe that is what is wrong with it. Originally written by Franz Werfel, it was scheduled for production by one management with Clifford Odets as the adapter. When this management dropped it, Jack H. Skirball, a Hollywood producer, took it to the Guild, and the Guild engaged S. N. Behrman to do the fixing. Behrman must have fixed it all over, for last night's Martin Beck Theatre program credits him alone with the adaptation.

A long tryout period seems to have helped little in the case of this Werfel piece. It is as though it found less confidence in itself the longer it stayed out, until now the only elements in it which remain firm and interesting are the central characters—which must have been Werfel's original contribution.

It is an ambitious production with a large cast and with Stewart Chaney scenes in a Paris hotel raid shelter, a Paris street, the grounds of a country estate, a woodsy spot, a bistro at St. Jean de Luz—and the stone pier at Hendaye. French philosophers, turncoat senators, German soldiers, refugees afoot and hotel proprietors are among those who wander through it, some times just for atmosphere and other times to speak sententiously.

Karlweis, Calhern O.K.

The story is of the Colonel—proud son of a Polish officer family—his girl and Jacobowsky. The Colonel must get out of Paris because he's vital to the Polish Government in Exile. Jacobowsky must get out, too, because Jacobowsky is vital to Jacobowsky. Once a Pole, he has been hunted from country to country. Being used to adversity, he can cope with it. He copes, even, with the Colonel's snobbishness, and with the Colonel's jealousy when the proud officer discovers that his girl likes the little Jew and laughs at his wit.

I don't think the philosophizing about the war which Mr. Behrman interjects is important, for it is pretty obvious. Funniest scene in the play is the one in which the Colonel decides that he must fight a duel with Jacobowsky to maintain his ego.

Calhern is splendidly pompous, deftly humorous as the officer. Karlweis is resourceful, smooth, very intelligently funny as Jacobowsky. J. Edward Bromberg has a character part as the sergeant and plays it as such, and Annabella, an attractive lass, makes me think her passion for the Colonel and for France is not too deep.

THE NEW YORK TIMES
March 15, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Jacobowsky and the Colonel"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

TO start right out with the good news, "Jacobowsky and the Colonel," which opened last evening at the Martin Beck, is the theatre's latest agreeable evening. The writing talents of Franz Werfel and S. N. Behrman, which outwardly might seem unalike, combined to tell its tale of a flight from France; and the Theatre Guild, already producing its share of the season's good plays, has given it a fine production. While not a great play, it is a pleasant one, and in this day and age that forms practically the seventh wonder.

The suspicion may exist that "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" is pretty much Jacobowsky's evening. The authors obviously liked the character of the refugee who had been spending "all my life in a futile effort to become a citizen of some country." In casting the part, the Guild turned to Oscar Karlweis, ex-Vienna and Mr. Karlweis is giving one of the best performances of the year. With a manner that includes some of the informality of Frank Craven, plus a great many flourishes of his own, he rescues the play from those moments when it becomes slow and sends it on its way again. The scenes where Jacobowsky is straightening out troubles are hilariously funny; but Mr. Karlweis also can bring pathos to scenes of defeat.

Jacobowsky is the eternal refugee, who has been fleeing so long he knows all the tricks. He can find automobiles when none exist, and gasoline in an arid country. In 1940, he is trying to leave Paris; he has the car but cannot drive, and so picks up a Polish colonel taking documents to London. A lordly soldier who, as Jacobowsky says, has "one of the finest minds of the fifteenth century," the colonel takes a girl along on the flight to a channel port. At the end, the two men get across to England, the girl stays in France.

* * *

There have been a good many plays of the Nazi invasion, but this is the first to take up the lighter side of a desperately serious subject. The Messrs. Werfel and Behrman manage to instill their characters with great good will, and if the colonel seems at times to be on the side of caricature, Jacobowsky takes care of that along with everything else. He says the colonel is Don Quixote, and his aide, Sancha, and that is quite true. As a play, the first act is slow, the second is wonderful and the third is the normal theatrical out-manoeuvering of the Nazis. There are a number of minor characters which bring an air of charm to the evening, and, as noted, there always is Jacobowsky.

Playing the part of the not bright but always "ethical" colonel is Louis Calhern. A huge man, he looks as though he might be a warrior of battles and hearts; he is pompous and vain until he begins to understand Jacobowsky better. Annabella of the screen is making her Broadway debut as the French girl who goes along with the colonel, and J. Edward Bromberg is the aide-de-camp to Quixote. There are other parts by Herbert Yost, Kitty Mattern, E. G. Marshall and Harold Vermilyea, Stewart Chaney has designed good settings. In directing, Elia Kazan has stressed the humor of the play, which was what the Messrs. Werfel and Behrman were getting at. A curious assortment of accents on the part of Mr. Calhern and some of the others might be blamed on anyone. Jacobowsky should see to that.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 15, 1944

Mr. Karlweis Saves the Day

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I DON'T KNOW how much of *Jacobowsky and the Colonel* is Franz Werfel's original play and how much is S. N. Behrman's adaptation; but I do know that it is mainly Oscar Karlweis's evening. In the role of Jacobowsky, a rueful, resourceful, amusing, understanding Jewish refugee caught in the trap of a collapsing France, Mr. Karlweis plays with the greatest charm, humor and warmth, and lifts a play that has its very good stretches but also its extremely bad ones over the hurdles. It is only through such appealing acting, such as engaging blend of personality and skill, that one can leave the theater with much to cavil at and yet with the sense of having had a nice time.

Jacobowsky itself shows all the signs of multiple workmanship (Clifford Odets also had a hand in it at one point), as well as the need for it. For it is built on a good comedy idea that works like a charm for a while, but only for a while, and then collides ruinously with reality. Apparently none of its authors knew how to avoid the crash, or quite what to do with the pieces; but it is probably Mr. Behrman who was at the wheel while *Jacobowsky* spun along the prettiest stretch of the road.

* * *

The play, occupying five days of June 1940 when the hegira began from Paris, brings together the clever little businessman, Jacobowsky, and the brave, aristocratic, assinine Polish Colonel Stjerbinsky. The Colonel can't find a car to escape from Paris in. Jacobowsky finds one but can't drive it. In desperation the lordly Colonel consents to team up with the lowly Jew—on his own terms. These include going plunk *toward* the Nazis to pick up the Colonel's young mistress. They pick her up. Thereafter, it is the ingenious Jacobowsky who cadges food and gasoline, gets the party over the bumps, proves gay and companionable. The young lady likes and admires him, and her comical Colonel becomes so jealous that he challenges Jacobowsky to a duel. But before it can take place some Nazis turn up, and it is again Jacobowsky's turn to be smart. He is—and amusing as well. The party gets away; and there the fun ends.

But unfortunately the play does not. The gay madness of the trip is followed by a lot of bad melodrama at the end of the line. The play pretty well falls to pieces. The Nazis are again outwitted—but this time through a lot of stale hokum. The comical Colonel comes to love and treasure Jacobowsky, and the two of them make their escape.

* * *

The play should somehow have been better than it is. should have got off to a faster start and not subsided into drivel at the end. For when it hits its comic stride, it is not only remarkably gay but also curiously touching. But at least in Jacobowsky it provides a character who holds up even after the story breaks down, and Mr. Karlweis has brought

him wonderfully to life. That in itself is enough to recommend the play.

Mr. Calhern's Colonel is very good too in its way except for his accent, and Annabella, in her first Broadway appearance, is likeable and attractive as the girl. There are nice performances by J. Edward Bromberg, E. G. Marshall, Harold Vermilyea and a number of others, and Mr. Kazan's staging is lively and understanding.

THE NEW YORK POST
March 15, 1944

'Jacobowsky and the Colonel' Escape From Conquered France

By WILELLA WALDORF

FRANZ WERFEL was among those who escaped to America after the fall of France. On his arrival he wrote a script about it upon which S. N. Behrman has based what the Theatre Guild terms "an American play" entitled "Jacobowsky and the Colonel," presented last night at the Martin Beck Theatre.

There were times last night when we wondered if Mr. Behrman hadn't actually written an American musical comedy instead of an American play. The stage often seemed all set for the entrance of an Agnes de Mille ballet. Louis Calhern as the aristocratic Polish colonel with a medieval mind occasionally appeared on the verge of bursting into song, while Gallic pulchritude was furnished by Annabella of the films, who has a low, husky voice like Garbo's. There was merry assistance by J. Edward Bromberg as the Colonel's batman, or whatever they call them in Poland. He played the harmonica when the Colonel turned his back to the audience and sawed away on the fiddle.

Karlweis as Jacobowsky

All this was diverting enough while France was in the process of falling all around, but the character who gives "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" its chief distinction is Jacobowsky himself, played with great simplicity and charm by Oscar Karlweis, the Viennese actor last seen here in "Rosalinda."

Jacobowsky is the perpetual refugee. Born in Poland, he has moved first to Berlin, then to Vienna, then to Prague, finally to Paris, only to have it fall to the Nazis. Used to being a man without a country, he is endlessly resourceful in a quiet but effective fashion. Having bought an automobile to escape in and being unable to drive, he offers the equipage to a Polish colonel bearing important papers to his government-in-exile abroad.

A 15th Century Mind

The colonel, possessed of what Jacobowsky accurately describes as "one of the finest minds of the 15th century," finally permits Jacobowsky to ride in the back seat after throwing out most of his luggage, and they are off, not to the Southwest but to the Northwest, where the Germans are. It seems the Colonel must rescue his beautiful Marianne before he escapes with the papers.

"Jacobowsky and the Colonel" is often entertaining, sometimes touching, and there is a burst of melodrama involving the Gestapo when the party finally reaches its rendezvous with The Man With the Gray Gloves. It is to the resourceful refugee that the irresponsible colonel owes not only his life but the safety of his precious papers. Between them, as Jacobowsky puts it, they make one hero.

Some Fetching Comedy

Throughout the performance we kept waiting for something that seemed always on the verge of happening but never did. This play has been en route for so long that we were, perhaps, expecting a bit too much of the much-discussed Werfel-Behrman collaboration. It is no masterpiece, but it does offer some fetching comedy, an unusual view of the fall of France and one uncommonly delightful role beautifully played by Mr. Karlweis.

NEW YORK SUN
March 15, 1944

'Jacobowsky and the Colonel,' New Comedy, Entertaining and Well-acted

By WARD MOREHOUSE

OUT of the tragedy and shame and defeat of France has come a warm and ingratiating comedy called "Jacobowsky and the Colonel," which the now sturdily affluent and newly resourceful Theatre Guild installed last evening at the Martin Beck. Put it down as one of the Guild's creditable productions, and one that is dominated by Oscar Karlweis, who gives a magnificent performance in the role of a Polish refugee.

Only occasionally does "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" actually measure up to its very considerable pre-Broadway buildup. Structurally, it is not a tight play. It is often spotty and ambling. But it does provide an engaging evening in the theater, and so hungry are our playgoers for something approaching genuine quality I am certain that this new piece will find a public and keep it for quite a time.

Here is a comedy, its authorship shared by Franz Werfel and S. N. Behrman, of a France that is stricken but unquelled—a tragi-comedy of refugees in harried and directionless flight over the congested roads, toward the sea, with the Germans in pursuit, and the story, specifically of the Polish merchant Jacobowsky, a Polish colonel and his French sweetheart, and their trek to the Atlantic coast.

The time is that tragic June of 1940 and the action of the play covers six days, taking S. L. Jacobowsky, the refugee—wistful, humorful, practical and indispensable—and the swaggering and amorous Colonel, a dauntless fellow, medieval in words, actions and point of view, from the basement of a Parisian hotel to the waterfront at St. Jean de Lux, and along with them go all-important Polish Government papers and the blond and alluring Marianne, representing the unquenchable spirit of France.

There are suggestions of symbolism in "Jacobowsky and the Colonel." There are moments that bring to the stage the ignominy and helplessness of a France that has fallen, but that will live again. There are scenes that are humorous, touching and starkly compelling. There are lines and situations that are very funny and the play's principal performers, Mr. Karlweis, Mr. Calhern and the decorative Annabella do extraordinarily well with them.

Mr. Karlweis in the role of the hunted refugee, Jacobowsky, plays with humor, sensitivity and understanding. It is the character of Jacobowsky, full of humility and wisdom, who frequently comes to the rescue of the play when it is faltering. Mr. Calhern is felicitous indeed as the strutting, blustering Don Quixote from out of another century. Hilda Vaughn gives a sharp characterization as the raffish Parisian inn-keeper, from whose hotel all guests flee as the Germans come on. There are good performances, too, from J. Edward Bromberg and Jane Marbury, as an Old Lady from Arras.

"Jacobowsky and the Colonel" is a comedy which has known several incarnations, but in the extensive credits now to be found upon the program of the Beck it is described as an original play by Franz Werfel and as "an American play based on same by S. N. Behrman."

Elia Kazan has done a skillful job with the staging and Stewart Chaney, in designing the scenery, has pictured portions of a France that we all knew so well and will see again—the mouldy old hotel and the cobbled streets, the waterfront cafe, and the open fields of the prim countryside, stretching forth in vari-colored squares, rectangles and parallelograms.

Far from a perfect play, this "Jacobowsky and the Colonel," but one that provides good entertainment, that is vastly amusing in some of its scenes—particularly those of the clashes between the Colonel and the refugee—and one that the now soaring Theater Guild has given a first-rate production.

NEW YORK AMERICAN-JOURNAL
March 15, 1944

'Jacobowsky' Opens At the Martin Beck

By ROBERT GARLAND

WHEN "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" set out upon its rocky road to Broadway, it was merely a play by Franz Werfel, he of "Embezzled Heaven" and "The Song of Bernadette." Then, somewhere along the line, no less a working dramatist than Clifford Odets took a hand in its revision. Mr. Odets' rewrite job proving unsatisfactory, S. N. Behrman was called in for consultation. Dr. Behrman, it seems, decided upon a major operation.

Now, at the Martin Beck, "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" is billed as "an American play" based on Mr. Werfel's "original." Which may be why last night's arrival in 45th st. starts out by being one thing and ends up by being something entirely different. This changing of dramatists twice in the middle of a play is a risky business.

For the first half, "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" is a timely and delightful comedy, albeit a timely and delightful comedy with timely and tragic undercurrents lapping fatefully at its foundations. Then, almost without warning, the Werfel-Odets-Behrman on-stage get-together becomes a timely and unconvincing melodrama. This change of attitude, along with the change of tempo, which must, of a necessity accompany it, is none too helpful.

Fun to Watch

Whatever they may or may not have been away back when Jacobowsky and the Colonel began their trek toward town, they now are two characters in search of still another author. The former, a Polish Jew, and the latter, a Polish army officer, are well drawn, human and entertaining at the outset. But, as their trials and tribulations increase, as the invading Germans come near and nearer, their theatrical third dimension deserts them.

From Paris to St. Cyrille, from St. Cyrille to Bayonne, from Bayonne to St. Jean de Lux — which almost nobody at the Martin Beck can pronounce correctly—our 1940 band of refugees is pursued by the Boche in what is known as "tourist" clothing. The two gentlemen of the title escape to England. The others remain unhappily behind to see France fall.

In the early stages of their desperate dash for freedom, the resourceful Jacobowsky and the high-and-mighty Colonel are fun to watch together. Especially when, having taken over Jacobowsky's automobile, Colonel Tadeusz Boleslav Stjerbinsky pauses en route to St. Jean de Luz to pick up his lady-friend, her luggage and the household pets she will not leave behind. Then come tragedy, melodrama, and a definite let-down.

Calhern Superb

In all his acting days, Louis Calhern has never given a finer, more forthright performance than he gives at the Martin Beck. His Colonel Tadeusz Boleslav Stjerbinsky is a superb characterization in the round, a mixture of strength and weakness, hauteur and humanity. Not even his Commodore in "The Great Big Doorstep" could equal it. And that, like Sir Hubert's, is praise indeed!

Oscar Karlweis, recently of "Rosalinda," is almost equally worth-while as Jacobowsky. His scenes, which are many, with Mr. Calhern are carried off with skill and understanding. Especially in the first and funniest portions of the play. Later on, the melodramatics undermine him, just as they undermine many of the others.

J. Edward Bromberg is at his Brombergian best as Szabuniewicz, the Colonel's orderly. If you go to the Martin Beck, keep your eye on his masterly pantomime. Annabella, as the Colonel's lady-love, is no more than so-so. Her accent as a Frenchwoman supposed to be